Professor William Catton - May 7, 1970 - Mead Memorial Chapel

What began to emerge here, over the past few days, was visible, palpable, compelling, and in a small way magnificent. Or so many of us thought. I refer to the spirit, which, despite continuing differences of opinion, of all shades, as to the size and nature of the problems we face, and the best ways of dealing with them, provided a common denominator, a unifying bond, a sense of direction for nearly all of our efforts. What began to emerge, in short, is community, if I may once more invoke that over-used, abused, ill-understood word. We cannot define it as easily as we can detect it. And it was, and has been, detectable here. There's no point in making windy, exaggerated claims for this concept. It does not imply uniformity, or conformity, or mindless singleness of purpose unless we are speaking of a community of ants. It presupposes difference of opinion, the right to disagree, and all of those individual freedoms covered by the Bill of Rights. It is not Utopian. The best of communities will generate friction because they are composed of human beings. What so impressed me, and many of my colleagues, and many of the students, to whom I have spoken, was the dawning awareness that we now have certain common concerns that we are together and mutually interdependent. All of the tired words we have been tossing back and forth frustrated by their absence or scarcity, dialogue, communication, understanding, purpose, suddenly took form.

The whole of an institution, at least while it is open and functioning, is always greater than the sum of its parts. Much of the spirit of the past few days arose from the discovery of this and of its great possibilities. These possibilities of collective self-discovery, affirmation of purpose, and a positive attempt to explore together the problems we face remain as strong this morning as they were yesterday. If what we saw happening here has the meaning and the potential — I am tempted to say the beauty — that so many of us witnessed, it will not dissipate or disappear because of a blackened building. It will not disappear when normal activities, academic activities are resumed. And when we gather again in the Fall. We are learning something invaluable. And the quality of the individuals in this community reinforce my conviction, reinforces my conviction, that what we have discovered will endure.

If I may paraphrase the words of an American I admire spoken some 35 years ago,

"To some generations much has been given, from some generations, much has been asked."

Certainly both of these are true of this generation, and this generation may now truly have a "rendevous with destiny".

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